

1.0 Introduction

1.1 VISION FOR LOS GATOS

Los Gatos is home. It is the type of community people want to live in because they feel a sense of belonging. When residents drive south on Highway 17, cross over Route 85, see the beautiful Town of Los Gatos nestled at the base of the Santa Cruz Mountains they know they are home. Los Gatos is an oasis of calm within one of the major economic engines in the world, Silicon Valley. People feel safe here. The Town provides excellent schools, beautiful parks, a wonderful Downtown, diverse shopping experiences, and an accessible and responsive government.

Los Gatos is a truly special place and residents want to protect their community from the increasing development pressures of the region. Residents expect all new development to fit into the fabric of the community and demand that new businesses enhance their high quality of life. Residents make it clear when development projects fail to meet their expectations. Proposed development projects are held to a higher standard and what is approved in other communities may not be acceptable in Los Gatos. New development must keep pace with the community's needs and must reflect the community's values. The next ten years will be a crucial time in the evolution of Los Gatos. Extreme care must be used in approving all new development applications. The impacts of new development must be evaluated in light of the development's overall community benefit. In addition, the benefit of new development must be measured against the ability of the proposed development and its architectural style to harmonize with existing development while minimizing impacts on existing residential neighborhoods and infrastructure. Support of new development from surrounding residents and property owners will be a major consideration during any development review process.

Preserving the small-town character of Los Gatos is a collection of related issues, including human scale of development, historic preservation, density and intensity, population growth, downtown, development in the Route 85/North 40 area, congestion, open space, views of the hills, the nature of businesses located in Town, protection of the Town's various neighborhoods, and community design.

The Town can utilize three important means for ensuring the continuity of values: (a) providing mechanisms for broad public participation in government in general and planning in particular, (b) taking initiative to coordinate with other jurisdictions on regional issues that impact our Town's character and quality of life, and (c) consistent and resolute enforcement of the General Plan, specific plans, and the Town code.

Residents expect strong leadership from their elected officials to guide the community into the next century and to ensure that the high quality of life in Los Gatos is protected for future generations. The General Plan is the Town's guide to achieve this vision.

Many of the issues identified in the General Plan are sustainability issues, including open space, hillside protection, environmental quality, natural plant and animal life, resource conservation, and community design.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

A. LOCATION:

The Town of Los Gatos nestled at the base of the Sierra Azules is located approximately 60 miles south of San Francisco, in the southwestern portion of

*One early business,
the Macabee Gopher
Trap Co. remains
and is still doing
business from its
original location on
Loma Alta Avenue.*

Los Gatos "is a fascinating microcosm of Western American small town history and architecture. Its local government, participated in by an inexhaustible pool of incredibly diverse, caring, broad-minded, opinionated and intelligent citizens, is one of the last bastions of participatory small town democracy. Its inhabitants, past and present, are full of civic mindedness, vociferous opinions, educational achievements, eccentricities and character. Most people love to visit Los Gatos." Kathy Morgan; Los Gatos Observed

Santa Clara County where the Santa Clara Valley meets the lower slopes of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Los Gatos is bounded by the City of San Jose to the north and east, the City of Campbell to the north, the Cities of Monte Sereno and Saratoga to the west, and unincorporated County of Santa Clara and the County of Santa Cruz to the south.

The Los Gatos Planning Area encompasses a wide variety of terrain, ranging from flat topography at the edge of the valley floor to densely wooded hillsides. Both the valley and hillsides are interspersed with creeks, streams and riparian habitat. The sharp contrast between the valley floor and the hillsides provides the Town's picturesque background.

B. HISTORY:

Los Gatos is one of Santa Clara County's oldest communities. In 1840, the Mexican government granted a land patent for a 6,600 acre rancho to Sebastian Peralta and Jose Hernandez. Los Gatos was originally named *La Rinconada de Los Gatos* (Cat's Corner) by early settlers due to the screams of mountain lions prowling in the night. In 1868, 100 acres of the rancho was selected as a town site. The Town was incorporated in 1887 and by 1890 the Town's population had grown to 1,652. When the first General Plan was adopted in 1963 the Town had grown to an area of approximately 4,000 acres, or 6.3 square miles, with a population in excess of 11,750. At the time the first revised General Plan was revised in 1971, the Town had grown to an area of 9 square miles with a population of 24,350. In 1984 Los Gatos covered approximately 10 square miles and had a population of 27,820 persons. Today (2000) the Town has a population of 30,274 in a 14 square mile area. While most of the growth through the 1970's was due to new development, most of the growth in the 1980's and 1990's was due to annexations, in-fill development and changing demographics.

The Town originally developed at a distance from other population centers and therefore evolved as an independent community having residential, commercial and industrial areas. The economics of the Town have changed from the wheat farming, milling, logging, orchard and cannery businesses in the 19th and early 20th centuries to the suburban, "high tech", visitor destination businesses of today. The railroad also played a major role in the growth and development of the Town, Los Gatos was either the terminus of the railroad or the transition point from standard to narrow gauge at more than one time during the railroad's operation. The climate and easy access by rail from San Francisco made Los Gatos an early tourist destination. Today, the Town is situated within the largest metropolitan area of northern California, and is closely tied to Silicon Valley and its fast paced economy. Los Gatos, however, retains a mix of residential, commercial and light industrial uses, still attracts visitors, and continues to retain its small town image.

Los Gatos prides itself as a "self contained community". Over 300 businesses serve the residents and act as a destination point for visitors who are attracted to its restaurants, hotels and variety of shops within a pedestrian oriented downtown setting. The Town is also an "inclusive" community with the full mix of ages, family sizes and incomes. Los Gatos has many parks and greenbelt areas, as well as a vibrant downtown area. Downtown Los Gatos is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is the model of what communities strive to achieve in a downtown.

Los Gatos is a General Law Town with a five-member Council and an annually rotating Mayor's position.

1.3 WHAT MAKES LOS GATOS SPECIAL?

What makes Los Gatos special is its small town atmosphere, strong sense of place, varied architecture, reminders of the past, traditions, unique physical setting, good schools, low crime rate, and the concerned and involved people who make up the community. The desire to protect the Town's high quality of life is

*"Each planning agency shall prepare and the legislative body of each county and city shall adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the county or city, and any land outside its boundaries which in the planning agency's judgment bears relation to its planning."
(Government Code Section 65300)*

demonstrated by extensive citizen participation in many service groups and community issues.

While residents may disagree over specific issues, they share a common vision of the future of Los Gatos. Residents are adamant in their desire to maintain a high quality of life and preserve the character of the Town. The overall community consensus is that Los Gatos:

- ☐ Be a full-service community that is also environmentally sensitive;
- ☐ Maintain a balanced, well-designed mix of residential, commercial, service and open space uses, fostering a pedestrian-oriented community with a small town, village-like character;
- ☐ Support an active business community that provides a wide variety of goods and services and a broad range of employment opportunities, minimizing the need to travel to other communities;
- ☐ Provides a well-run, efficient municipal government that is fiscally healthy, with high levels of public safety, recreational, art and cultural amenities and that is committed to high quality education.

The Town has an eclectic mix of building styles. It is a unique combination of old and new that is indicative of a community that has evolved over a period of time. The Town's architecture ranges from a few homes built in the 1850's through a beautifully preserved mix of Victorian cottages and craftsman bungalows, some Victorian and Art Deco commercial buildings, post World War II ranch houses and post modern homes and commercial buildings from more recent decades. The Town demonstrates that it is possible to value innovation while appreciating and preserving the past.

1.4 USE AND PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN (Reorganized)

The role of each community's general plan is to act as a constitution for development, the foundation upon which all land use decisions are to be based. Land use decisions encompass not only zoning, but circulation, design, open space and other factors. The plan is a policy document to assist and guide local decision makers. To be considered consistent with the General Plan, a project must not only be consistent with the Land Use Plan, it must also further the goals of all elements of the General Plan and meet the intent of its policies.

The Town of Los Gatos is always evolving with new opportunities to mold the future character of the Town, while preserving the best of its past and present. The Los Gatos General Plan addresses the issues that are important to consider in the ongoing development of our community. The plan explains how our natural resources and physical features are to be maintained and enhanced, and directs how we incorporate them into in-fill projects, new projects and our community investments. The General Plan also identifies land uses and their distribution.

The General Plan is used by the Town Council and Planning Commission to evaluate land use changes, make funding and budget recommendations and decisions, and to evaluate specific development proposals. Town staff uses the Plan to regulate building and development and to make recommendations on projects to the Planning Commission and Town Council. The Plan is also used by residents, neighborhood groups and developers to understand the Town's long-range plans and to evaluate specific development proposals.

A General Plan is a legal document that must meet specific State requirements for content. The Los Gatos General Plan meets or exceeds the requirements of the California Government Code. The Plan is an integrated, internally consistent statement of the official land use policy for the Town of Los Gatos and the Town's Sphere of Influence (SOI). The Plan addresses each issue prescribed by State law as it applies to Los Gatos. The Plan contains land use and circulation maps.

It also contains text that identifies goals, sets forth policies and standards, and identifies implementation strategies.

Goals are ultimate purposes expressing community values toward which the Town will direct effort. Policies are statements of principle or guiding action that imply a clear commitment and a direction that the Town elects to follow in order to meet its goals and objectives. Implementing strategies are programs, procedures, strategies or techniques carried out in response to adopted policy to achieve a specific goal or objective.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires all state and local government agencies to consider the environmental consequences of projects over which they have discretionary authority. The State CEQA Statutes Section 21065 defines a project as “an activity which may cause either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment”. Therefore, the Town of Los Gatos, as the lead agency, was required to prepare and certify an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the General Plan 2000.

The General Plan 2000 EIR is a public document that assesses the overall environmental effects of the General Plan 2000 at a program level of detail and indicates ways to reduce or avoid possible environmental damage. The Program EIR generally analyzes the broad environmental effects for the General Plan 2000, and provides a baseline, or “first tier,” against which future projects implemented under General Plan 2000 build-out are evaluated. Where subsequent CEQA documentation is required for a future project under General Plan 2000 build-out, the Town must implement the applicable mitigation measures developed in the Program EIR, and focus its analysis on site-specific issues that can not otherwise be addressed at a program or policy level of analysis.

The EIR is intended to be used as a companion document with the General Plan 2000. Mitigation measures identified in the EIR have been included as policies or implementing strategies in the General Plan 2000. Additional mitigation measures not included in the General Plan 2000 are also identified in the EIR (refer to Section 2 of the EIR, which provides a composite list of all environmental mitigation measures for the General Plan 2000).

1.5 ORGANIZATION OF THE GENERAL PLAN

The last comprehensive update of the General Plan was completed in 1985. Subsequent to 1985 the Town adopted the Route 85 and Vasona Light Rail Element in 1994 and the revised Housing Element was certified by the State of California in 1997. As part of this revision all elements have been reviewed, revised, reorganized and reformatted. Although the Town is considered “built out,” the policies regarding growth and development within the community have remained generally consistent with the 1985 Plan. This General Plan includes the seven mandated elements and three permissive elements listed below:

• Land Use	Section 2.0
• Housing	Section 3.0
• Circulation	Section 4.0
• Route 85 and Vasona Light Rail	Section 5.0
• Open Space	Section 6.0
• Conservation	Section 7.0
• Noise	Section 8.0
• Safety	Section 9.0
• Community Design	Section 10.0
• Human Services	Section 11.0

The mandatory elements are shown in bold print

1.6 THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE PROCESS

The Los Gatos Town Council formed the first of two General Plan Task Forces in June 1997, for the purpose of reviewing, identifying, and setting priorities for problems and issues with the General Plan and the Downtown and Hillside Specific Plans. Members were selected from neighborhoods throughout the Town, including County "pockets", to ensure a diverse range of viewpoints.

Task Force I participated in a variety of activities and exercises designed to promote communication, build consensus, and produce a comprehensive review of the Town's planning documents. Task Force I met six times over a seven month period to discuss the General Plan and Specific Plans. Members complete extensive study assignments resulting in the collection of a considerable amount of data. Issues were either identified for early action or needing further study. Task Force meetings were open to the public.

Task Force I presented the results of their activities in a Final Report that was submitted to the Town Council on January 26, 1998.

The Council subsequently appointed a second 30 member Task Force which met for seven months. The charge of the Task Force II was to determine how the General Plan should address the issues identified by Task Force I. Task Force II was also asked to provide the General Plan Committee with input on the Draft General Plan and Hillside Specific Plan. Task Force II broke issues down into six major issue groups for discussing purposes and developed a list of policies and policy issues that were distributed to the General Plan Committee beginning in November 1998.

The charge of the Council for Task Force I and II did not include the North Forty, the Los Gatos Boulevard Plan, or the Housing or Vasona/Route 85 Element of the current General Plan.